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July 27, 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. McGEORGE BUNDY

SUBJECT: Timing of Negotiations on Berlin

To follow up my comment of this morning: I would consider it highly desirable to expand on the President's expression of readiness to negotiate. It seems to me that we should adopt a posture of welcoming negotiations. We should avoid being in the position in which the mere fact of a diplomatic confrontation seems like a retreat. To this end I would consider it highly desirable if we were to take the initiative in inviting the Soviets to a four-power conference. Probably the best occasion would be a joint invitation by the Western Foreign Ministers when they meet in Paris next week. It is worth considering, however, whether some earlier statement may not be desirable. It is, after all, possible that Khrushchev replies to the President's speech by calling for a conference himself. Though this would not be inconsistent with the President's speech, it does tend to put us in the position of constantly reacting to Soviet moves. Could not the President or the Secretary of State make an early opportunity to state that one of the results they expect out of the Paris meetings is a political program for the West and that we plan to be ready for negotiations starting October 1? The formal proposal for a conference could then be made in Paris.

Henry A. Kissinger

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